

©      ADDITIONAL  
L E T T E R S  
TO A  
PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER,  
IN ANSWER TO  
MR. WILLIAM HAMMON.

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HONORARY MEMBER OF THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AT PETERS-  
BURGH, AND OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF MEDICINE AT PARIS.

SCILICET HAUD SATIS EST RIVOS SPECTARE FLUENTES—  
FONTEM IPSUM SPECTARE JUVAT.

ANTI LUCRETIVS.

B I R M I N G H A M,  
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ADDITIONAL

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T H E  
P R E F A C E.

**I**T is certainly to be wished, that every man was at full liberty, not only to publish his real opinions on any subject whatever, but also to urge them with the greatest force, and to recommend them by the strongest arguments that he can produce in support of them. No *lover of truth* will wish to stand on any other ground.

For my own part, I rejoice that a *professed atheist* has thought proper to stand forth in defence of his principles, though it is not with all the consistent boldness that may be expected from one who believes in a God, a providence, and a future state. I myself have no opinions that I wish to

shelter behind any *authority* whatever ; and should rejoice to see the time (and that time, I doubt not, as the world improves in wisdom, will come) when the civil powers will relieve themselves from the attention they have hitherto given to all matters of speculation, and religion amongst the rest ; an attention which has proved so embarrassing to the governors, and so distressing to the governed ; and when no more countenance will be given to any particular mode of *religion*, than is given to particular modes of *medicine*, or of *philosophy*.

Individuals are much better situated for providing for themselves, in this respect, than any *representatives* can do for them ; and the religion that men would voluntarily adopt for themselves would make them the best subjects to any government, and especially

especially to one that should allow them all, without distinction, this perfect and equal liberty. This would be an attachment much stronger, and more valuable, than any that can be secured by *hire*, as is that of the members of an established church. However, till *nations* get wisdom, *individuals* must bear with their folly, and endeavour to instruct them; and this is most effectually done, by the explicit avowal, and the fearless defence, of whatever we apprehend to be true, and to be conducive to the good of society and of mankind.

That our readers may form a just idea of the subject of the present controversy, it may be proper to inform them, that Mr. Hammon, though a declared atheist, is far from asserting, with the Epicureans of old, and the generality of atheists before

him, that there are no marks of *design* in the visible universe. Besides what I have quoted from him in the course of these Letters, he considers it as undeniably true (p. 4) that “atoms cannot be arranged in  
 “a manner expressive of the most exquisite  
 “design, without competent intelligence  
 “having existed somewhere.”

He says farther (*Prefatory Address*, p. 28)  
 The “*vis naturæ*, the perpetual industry,  
 “intelligence, and provision of nature, must  
 “be apparent to all who see, feel, or think.  
 “I mean to distinguish this active, intel-  
 “ligent, and designing principle, inherent  
 “as much in matter, as the properties of  
 “gravity, or any elastic, attractive, or re-  
 “pulsive power, from any extraneous fo-  
 “reign force and design, in an invisible  
 “agent, supreme, though hidden lord, and  
 “master over all effects and appearances  
 “that

“ that present themselves to us in the course  
“ of nature. The last supposition makes  
“ the universe, and all other organized  
“ matter, a machine, made or contrived by  
“ the arbitrary will of another being, which  
“ other being is called *God*; and my theory  
“ makes a God of this universe, or admits  
“ no other God, or designing principle,  
“ than matter itself, and its various or-  
“ ganizations.”

Such is the fair state of this controversy. It is my business, therefore, to shew, in the first place, that the visible universe is not, and cannot be, that *uncaused being* which Mr. Hammon supposes; and secondly, that the seat of that intelligence, which is acknowledged to be in the universe, cannot be in the visible universe itself, but must reside in, and belong to, some being distinct from it. One of these hypotheses  
must

must be true; for a third cannot be imagined.

These, then, are the principal subjects of the following Letters. But I have also taken some notice of what Mr. Hammon has observed with respect to the moral attributes of the deity, the moral influence of religion, and other subjects of a miscellaneous nature.

Mr. Hammon is also so far from repro-  
bating, as other atheists have done, the idea  
of a *future life*, that he not only considers  
it as desirable, but even as not impossible,  
or incredible. For he places it among the  
things *inadmissible* and *inconclusive* (p. 10)  
that “an atheist believes himself to be at  
“his death for ever excluded from return-  
“ing life.”

Atheism,

Atheism, so qualified, certainly loses much of the horror with which it has hitherto been regarded, and affords room to hope that it will soon give place to the system which gives us the fullest and most satisfactory assurance of that *future life*, to which Mr. Hammon looks with *desire*, and, seemingly, not without some degree of *hope*. This certainly ought to be a motive with the world to give him a patient hearing; they have so much reason to expect a favourable issue to the debate. What occasion can there be for *terror*, or *violence* of any kind, when there is so little reason to distrust the natural power of *truth*. If I fail, let abler champions be called in; but let atheism triumph, rather than religion, by the help of force.

To conclude this preface with enforcing the sentiments with which it began:

let

let those weak christians, who are for calling in the aid of the magistrate to suppress heresy, learn to respect their religion more, and not act the part of the *moles* (in the excellent comparison made use of by a worthy baronet, in the late debate on the Dissenters bill) who thought that the mountain, at the foot of which they were at work, was in danger of falling, and consulted how to provide some better foundation for it. Let them be assured, that its own natural basis, is abundantly sufficient for its support.

If this comparison does not strike them, let them consider the instructive fable of *the horse and the stag*. What the horse lost by calling in the aid of the man, is but a faint emblem of what christianity has lost, by calling in the aid of the magistrate.—They have both of them, by this means,

means, got *masters*, who, on all occasions, make use of them for their own purposes, without any regard to them,

This I now urge in favour of my adversary; but it is language that I may have learned from standing in the same predicament myself. For, as I have observed in the course of these Letters, if the laws of this country were strictly executed, we should both be involved in the same fate. And, perhaps, while my antagonist and myself, like *the mouse and the frog*, are assaulting each other with our weapons of pointed straw, the great *eagle of civil power* may seize upon us both, and crush us, without distinction, and without mercy.

I make no apology for making no difference between the author of the *Prefatory Address*,

*Address*, and the body of the work to which I am replying, as Mr. Hammon, the writer of the former, approves of, and adopts the latter; and to have distinguished them from one another would have been rather embarrassing. All the letters are addressed to Mr. Hammon.

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C O N T E N T S.

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ADDITIONAL LETTERS  
TO A  
PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.

LETTER I.

Of Mr. HAMMON'S *Professions and  
Conduct, &c.*

SIR,

WHEN I wrote my *Letters to a  
philosophical Unbeliever*, I certainly  
wished that some person of that character  
would calmly and seriously discuss the ar-  
guments which I there advanced, for the  
belief of a God and a benevolent providence,  
and give me an opportunity of perceiving  
what it was that really determined his mind  
to a conclusion so different from my own;  
though I did not, as you seem to have  
B imagined,

imagined, undertake to answer all the objections that might be made to what I had advanced on the subject. There is, however, something so peculiar in your Answer, that I have thought proper to take notice of it, and on that account to add a few more *Letters* to those that I published before.

There is a great appearance of *ingenuoufness*, and also of *courage*, in your conduct, which does you honour; and in this country, and in these times, I am confident it will not bring you into any inconvenience. You say (*Advertisement*, p. 8.) that you will be looked on, as “ a miracle of hardiness, for  
 “ daring to put your name to what you  
 “ have published.” And whereas some have doubted, whether there ever was such a person as a proper atheist, you say (*Prefatory Address*, p. 17.) “ To put that out  
 “ of all manner of doubt, I do declare  
 “ that, upon my honour, I am one. Be  
 “ it, therefore, for the future remembered,  
 “ that in London, in the kingdom of Eng-  
 “ land

“ land, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty one, a man hath publicly declared himself an Atheist.” You even profess your readiness (ib. p. 21.) to suffer martyrdom in this cause, and to glory in it.

You must allow me, however, to observe, that I have not found in your conduct that perfect ingenuoufness and courage to which you pretend. You charge me with sending no answer to the *letter* which you have published in your *postscript*, or “ none that ever came to your hand.” But whether this was *my* fault or *yours*, let our readers judge from the following facts. That letter I received (only dated September 23d, and not October the 23d, 1781) on the 25th of September; and on the 27th of the same month, I sent the following answer; addressed, according to your own subscription, to Mr. *William Hammond, jun. Liverpool*. The post-mark also of your letter, was LIVERPOOL.

B 2

S I R,

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S I R,

I SHALL be very happy to do every thing in my power to make you perfectly easy, with respect to the part you wish to take. But this can only be by giving you my real opinion, that you have nothing at all to fear, especially if you write with decency, as a serious enquirer after truth. I am myself as obnoxious to the laws of this country as you can be ; and at this day a *heretic* is, I should think, in more danger than an *unbeliever*.

If, contrary to my expectations, any prosecution should be undertaken against you, I can promise the most earnest interposition of myself and my friends in your favour ; but farther than this, I do not think it right to engage myself.

I do not recollect that I have any where undertaken to answer all my opponents :  
but.

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but this is of no consequence. If what you write be deemed worthy of an answer, you need not fear having one, and from an abler hand than mine.

Sincerely wishing you may proceed in your purpose, and meet with no obstruction in it, I am,

**SIR,**

**Your very humble servant,**

**BIRMINGHAM, 27th  
September, 1781.**

**J. PRIESTLEY.**

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Four days after this I received the following.

REV. SIR,

I WROTE you a letter on a philosophical subject this day se'nnight, since which I have had no answer. I only want now to know whether that letter reached you, and whether you intend to send me any answer, or not. I am,

REV. SIR,

Your most obedient and humble servant,

WILLIAM HAMMON, JUN.

LIVERPOOL, September 30, 1781.

The post-mark of this letter was also  
LIVERPOOL,

I cannot

I cannot say that the *tone* of this letter was pleasing to me; nor indeed is it of a piece with the *civility* of the former letter; besides that, the complaint contained in it must, upon the slightest reflection, have appeared unreasonable. For I received your letter on the 25th, and omitting only one single day, answered it on the 27th; and though it was possible that you might have received an answer before the 30th, it was barely so; and allowing for common accidents, such as my being out of the way, or very particularly engaged at the time of its arrival at my house (which is not in Birmingham, but only near it) it was not to be expected,

No person, however, of your name could be found in Liverpool, though several persons, some of them my particular friends, and at my request, made diligent inquiry concerning you. My own letter was returned to me, and it is now at your service, with the proper post-marks upon it,

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and shall be sent to you without delay, if you will inform me where it will really find you.

Your *Prefatory Address* is dated Oxford-street, N<sup>o</sup> 418; but at that place no such person could be heard of. There is also no name of a *publisber* annexed to your work. How then can you say, as you do, (ib. p. 21), that you have “ventured  
“to subscribe your publication with your  
“name, as well as I do my *Letters*, to  
“which your publication is an answer.” If you inquire for me at Birmingham, as I did for you at Liverpool, I have no doubt but you will readily find me, and I assure you I shall be very glad to see you there.

As to your readiness to suffer *martyrdom* in the cause of atheism, I hope you will never be put to the trial. But you must allow me to observe, that this ostentatious profession of your courage before hand, together with your deficiency in point of  
*ingenuoufness*

*ingenuousness of mind*, in the instance above-mentioned, gives me no expectation that you would really stand it.

You seem to be apprehensive of the *laws of this country*; but I know of no law that can affect you, except *one*, which equally affects myself. I mean the act of William and Mary, which makes it *blasphemy*, punishable by confiscation of goods, and, if persisted in, imprisonment for life, either to deny that “any of the Three Persons, the “Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, is God; or “to maintain that there are more Gods “than one.” Of these three, I have not scrupled, on many occasions, to deny the divinity of one, and the separate existence of another; so that if the law were executed, I should suffer just the same as you, who deny the divinity of one of them, and the existence of the other two.

I would not be understood to boast of my courage, though I have lived in the open violation of this law, even citing it, and censuring

furing it about twenty years; because I should  
 not have ventured to walk at large, as I have  
 done, and now do, by the mere connivance  
 of my countrymen, unprotected by any law, if  
 I had not thought that I had sufficient rea-  
 sons to confide in their good will, and to  
 presume on the improving *spirit of the times*.  
 Without this secret persuasion, if I had  
 published at all (in opposition to an article  
 of faith, so guarded by laws and penalties)  
 it would probably have been without my  
 name; but I think I should not have used  
 any *false pretences*, or have made a parade of  
 courage, which I really had not. I hope  
 you will find that the people of this coun-  
 try, at least, have made so much progress in  
 that *melioration* of which you profess your-  
 self to be a believer, as that an avowed  
*Atheist* has nothing more to fear than an  
 avowed *Socinian*.

The religion that I profess hath never  
 been more than barely *tolerated* by the civil  
 power of any country, and very seldom so  
 much as that. But in this circumstance it  
 more

more resembles the kingdom of my master, which he declared to be *not of this world*.

I own I am so much impressed by this consideration, that I do not wish that my religion may ever be in any other circumstances, so as to receive any thing that can be called *aid*, or *countenance*, from worldly power. We have seen enough of a pretended *alliance between Church and State*. It has only contributed to debase the one, and enslave the other.

It is also not perfectly of a piece with the *courage* to which you pretend, to endeavour to divert the resentment of *Christians*, by intimating, that *they* are not concerned in the question. You say, (*Advertisment*, p. 5.)  
 “ Revealed knowledge is not descanted upon,  
 “ and therefore Christians need take no offence.  
 “ Doubts upon natural religion  
 “ have not hitherto been looked upon as  
 “ attacks upon revelation, but rather as  
 “ corroborations of it.” And again, (p. 7)  
 “ The religion established in this country is  
 “ not

“not the religion of nature, but the religion of Moses and of Jesus, with whom the writer has nothing to do. He trusts, therefore, he shall not be received as a malevolent disturber of such common opinions as are esteemed to keep in order a set of low wretches, so inclinable to be lawless.”

All this is manifestly disingenuous. Do you really believe that christianity is not affected by the belief or disbelief of a God? What becomes of the divine mission of Moses, or of Christ, if there be no such being as that God, from whom they pretended to be sent. You must know very well, that they are not such doubts as these, that were ever thought to be any corroboration of revealed religion.

What could it be but *timidity*, and to avoid giving umbrage to the ruling powers, that led you to declare (*ibid*, p. 6) that you have no desire to make converts, and to say, (*Prefatory Address*, p. 15) “I declare I am  
“ rather

“ rather pleased there are so few atheists,  
 “ than at all anxious to make more. I tri-  
 “ umph in my superior light. I and my  
 “ friend are so proud, in our singularity of  
 “ being atheists, that we will hardly open  
 “ our lips in company, when the question is  
 “ started, for fear of making converts, and  
 “ so lessening our own enjoyments, by a  
 “ numerous division of our privilege with  
 “ others !”

Now I am at a loss how to reconcile this  
 either with your publishing any thing on  
 the subject, or with the *benewolence* to which  
 you likewise pretend in this publication, as  
 “ an attempt (*Advertisement*, p.7) to substi-  
 “ tute better foundations for morality,” and  
 with the idea of that *debasement of mind*,  
 which you frequently ascribe to the belief of  
 religion. If atheism be a good thing, with  
 respect to yourself and friends, why should  
 it not be equally good with respect to others;  
 and from what good principle can you wish  
 to confine the benefit to yourselves only; and  
 why should you not both *speak*, as well as  
 write,

*write*, and *suffer martyrdom* in the cause. If, on the other hand, religion be a thing valuable to society at large, though it should happen not to be so with respect to yourself, why do you not forbear to write as well as to speak against it. You say (*Prefatory Address*, p. 15) that you are resolved to make no reply to any answer I shall make to you; and that if I should have the advantage in the argument, you will “bear my triumph without repining!” Yet in the same page, you promise an answer to my intended letters in behalf of *revelation*? I really see no sort of consistency either with respect to *sense*, or to *courage*, in this conduct of yours.

In general, I have no reason to complain of uncivil treatment from you; but it is not very handsome in you to put the interpretation that you do upon my saying, that I shall proceed with my *Letters to a philosophical Unbeliever*, provided that those which I have published be *well received*, when you say (*Prefatory Address*, p. 14) “It is, in the sum total, just as much as if you had said,  
“ *provided*

*“ provided this book sells well, I will write  
 “ another.”*

It is true, as you say, that I have written many books, and if life and health be continued to me, I shall probably write more; but I can truly say (and the nature and complexion of my publications will not contradict it) that I have never yet written any thing solely, or principally, with a view to any advantage that might accrue from it; and several things, with a certainty of being a loser. Not one of them was written to please a patron, to court the populace, or to recommend myself to any sect of Christians. Certainly not those of the established church, and if possible, still less those of the same denomination with myself. It was even contrary to my own expectation, that, after some of my publications, I should have met with any countenance from them. But they have had much more liberality than I had presumed upon. And my theological writings are certainly ill calculated to gain the applause of those who are usually stiled philosophers.

My

My object, I trust, is the simple pursuit of truth, from the full persuasion, that the consequence of this will ultimately be friendly to society.

The sale of a book is certainly one means of judging of its success; but of this I can assure you, Sir, I have no reason to boast; for, instead of the *number of editions* you speak of, not one, and that a very moderate one, hath yet been sold. In other respects also, the event has been as little flattering. I do not know that my book has converted a single unbeliever; and if, as I hope, it has confirmed the faith of some, you say it hath contributed to the unhinging and overturning of yours. On no account, therefore, have I, as yet, any encouragement to proceed with this work, as I once intended. You have, however, no need to wait for the *continuation* of those *Letters*, to which you promise an answer. I have really nothing material to add to what I have already advanced on the subject in my *Institutes of natural and revealed religion*. I could only expect

expect to state some parts of the evidences of revelation in a clearer and more unexceptionable light, and to reply with advantage to some particular objections. I beg, therefore, that you would reply to that work in the first place; and if you advance any thing that I shall think to be material, whether I write with more or less difficulty, you may depend upon an answer from me. I shall be happy to contribute any thing in my power to excite a more general attention to a subject of so much importance; being perfectly satisfied, that *truth*, which is all my object, will be a gainer by the discussion.

I am, SIR,

Your's, &c.

J. PRIESTLEY.

C            LETTER

## L E T T E R    I I.

*Of the proper proof of the existence of a  
GOD, as an uncaused Being.*

S I R,

**A**S you do not discuss any of my arguments at large, but only deliver your own opinion, in a desultory, but striking manner, I do not know that I can reply to you in any better way, than by first bringing into a short compass, and exhibiting in one connected view, the principal steps in my former arguments, to which you do not appear to me to have given sufficient attention, notwithstanding I am satisfied, from your quotations, that you have read my book. The *principles and modes of argumentation* are equally known to us both. I have endeavoured to explain them in my former *Letters*, and our *data* are contained in the same *face of nature*, which is equally open to our inspection. Let us then consider the different conclusions that we draw from the same premises.

To

To instance in some one part of the system of nature, as a specimen of the whole, I have observed, that from whatever reason we are led to conclude that a *telescope* required a maker, an *eye* must have required a maker also; since they are both of them equally mere *instruments*, adapted to answer a particular purpose. They, therefore, prove the existence of what we call a *mind*, capable of perceiving that end or purpose, with a power of providing that means, and of adapting it to its end.

This mind must be a thing entirely foreign to the telescope, and consequently to the eye; it being as contrary to appearances that the eye should make any part of this mind, as that the telescope should.

In the same manner we are necessarily led to conclude, that the *animal* whose eye it is, is the production of some mind, or intelligent being (for every *power* is referred to some *substance*) foreign to itself, and also the *system* of which that animal is a part, com-

prehending the whole *visible universe*; each part of which bears a relation to the rest, and therefore must derive its origin from a being whose intelligence is capable of comprehending the whole.

The supposed *eternal generation* of one plant, or one animal from another, does not in the least remove the difficulty of conceiving how any plant, or animal, should have no foreign cause; because there is nothing in any plant or animal, that is even capable of comprehending its own structure; and much less have they the additional power of properly *producing* any thing like themselves, and of enabling one of the species to produce another. This has been the effect of an intelligence much superior to theirs. How any thing that they do contributes to this end, is altogether unknown to them.

We are, therefore, in this train of speculation, necessarily led to *one great intelligent being*, capable both of *comprehending*, and of *producing* all the visible universe. This  
being

being must have existed from all eternity, without any foreign cause; for, if it had had a beginning, it must have had a prior cause. We cannot, indeed, conceive *in what manner*, or *on what principles*, as we may say, such a being exists, or why it might not be, that he should not have existed. But this does not affect the certainty, that such a being *does* exist, drawn from the certain existence of what necessarily requires and proves it.

Nor is there any thing peculiar in this particular argument. In many other cases we admit general *facts*, without pretending to have any idea of the *mode* or *manner* of their existence. We have no idea at all how the principles of sensation and thought should depend upon, or result from, the contexture of the brain; but as we know, from undeniable facts, that these properties, or powers, do result from that organization, we necessarily believe it, without having any farther distinct idea on the subject. In like manner we firmly believe, that there must have been an eternally existent and intelligent being,

capable of producing the visible universe, without having any farther idea how this should be. This is not, strictly speaking, believing what is *incomprehensible*, but what we *do* perfectly comprehend, though we perceive it is connected with something that we are not able to comprehend. But as you lay particular stress on this subject, I shall enter a little farther into the discussion of it.

You say (*Prefatory Address*, p. 32) “ It  
 “ is impossible for an intellectual being to  
 “ believe firmly in that of which he can  
 “ form no conception. I hold the deity,  
 “ the fancied deity, at least, of whom,  
 “ with all his attributes, such pompous  
 “ descriptions are set forth, to the great  
 “ terror of old women, and amusement of  
 “ young children, to be an object of which  
 “ we form (as appears when we scrutinize  
 “ into our ideas) no conception, and there-  
 “ fore can give no account.” You also say,  
 (p. 48) “ All that Epicurus and Lucretius  
 “ have so greatly and convincingly said, is  
 “ swept away in a moment by these better  
 “ reasoners,

“ reasoners, who yet scruple not to de-  
 “ clare, with Dr. Priestley, that what they  
 “ reason about is not the subject of human  
 “ understanding. But let it be asked, is  
 “ it not absurd to reason with a man about  
 “ that, of which that same man asserts we  
 “ have no idea at all? Yet, will Dr.  
 “ Priestley argue, and say it is of no im-  
 “ portance whether the person with whom  
 “ he argues has a conception or not of the  
 “ subject. *Having no ideas includes no*  
 “ *impossibility*; therefore, he goes on with  
 “ his career of words, to argue about an  
 “ unseen being, with another whom he  
 “ will allow to have no idea of the sub-  
 “ ject; and yet it shall be of no avail in  
 “ the dispute, whether he has or no, or  
 “ whether he is capable or incapable of  
 “ having any. Reason failing, the passions  
 “ are called upon,” &c.

Let us now see whether the *career of*  
*words, without ideas*, be more justly laid  
 to my charge, or yours. In order to this,  
 I wish, Sir, you would consider what con-

ception you have, or what account you can give of an uncaused and eternally existent universe, every separate part of which bears undeniable marks of a design and intelligence, of which itself is not capable. If you only attend to the case, I think you will soon find that your ideas are far from being clear or satisfactory; notwithstanding you say (p. 37) in general, that to suppose an "infinite succession of finite causes, is so far from being difficult, that a mind not afraid to think, will find it the most easy contemplation in the world to dwell upon. It is probable," you say (p. 38) "that if one horse had a cause, all horses had. But will not the argument be more consonant to itself, in supposing all horses had the same cause; and as one is seen to be generated from a horse and a mare, so all were, from all eternity."

How this conclusion can appear *clear* and *satisfactory* to your mind, is to me not a little extraordinary, as it gives me no satisfaction

tion at all. To me it is the very same thing as if, knowing nothing historically about the matter, a man should find such a city as *London*, and conclude that it had existed from eternity, just as it is, and had no foreign cause; or as if, without knowing any thing concerning the production of *horses*, or of *men*, he should conclude that any *particular horse*, or *man*, had existed from eternity, without any foreign cause. I do not see how these cases differ; because the whole *race of animals* shews the same marks of design, in the relation they bear to other parts of the system, that the several parts of any individual being bear to the rest of its particular system; and of a design of which they are themselves incapable. Yet should any person affirm, concerning *London*, or concerning any particular horse, or man, what you do not hesitate to affirm concerning the *whole species*, and concerning the *universe*, you would not scruple to say, that he talked without having any distinct conception or ideas, or without reasoning consequentially from them,

them. For there is no objection against the independent existence of the *individuals*, that does not equally lie against that of the *whole species*.

I am ready enough to acknowledge, that there is something relating to an *independent first cause*, of which I can form no proper idea, that is, of which I have no knowledge. But this certainly implies no *contradiction*, any more than my ignorance concerning many other things, of the *existence* of which I have no doubt. Every thing that I see I suppose to have a cause foreign to itself, because it is not capable of comprehending itself; and the whole *visible universe*, in this respect, comes under the same description with any plant or animal that is a part of it. But there is not this objection against the supposition of a being that is capable of comprehending itself, and all things else, having existed without cause from all eternity, whatever other difficulties may attend the speculation. If, then, you adopt that opinion which is pressed with  
the

the least difficulty, and is farthest removed from a manifest absurdity, you must abandon that of the independent existence of the *visible universe*, and have recourse to an *invisible first cause*; which is the only alternative left you, in order to avoid the most palpable absurdity.

As you may, perhaps, still object (though you do not urge it very particularly) that the visible universe itself, though bearing marks of design, may as well be conceived to have had no foreign cause, as that the cause of the universe should have had none; I shall endeavour to state more distinctly why I conceive that there is a very great difference in the two cases.

The obvious reason why an *eye*, which is properly an instrument, or a means to gain a particular end, and also why the *animal* that is possessed of it, which is a *system of means* adapted to various ends, cannot have been uncaused, is that they are not capable of comprehending themselves. They are properly

perly *contrivances*, and therefore necessarily suppose a *contriver*, just as much as a *telescope* does, which comes under the same description with the *eye*; being an instrument adapted to answer a particular purpose.

Consequently, the mind can never rest till it comes to a being possessed of that wonderful property, but of which we can have no distinct idea, because we are not possessed of it ourselves, viz. *self-comprehension*. And this being must be so essentially different from all others, that, whereas they *must* be derived, this *may* be underived; and if it *may*, it will follow from other considerations, it absolutely *must*. For the mind will always revolt at the idea of going back *ad infinitum*, through an infinite succession of mere finite causes, whatever you may pretend to the contrary.

It is not pretended, as I have said, that we can conceive, *a priori*, that a being possessed of self-comprehension, must have been uncaused: but as the mind cannot rest  
till

till it arrives at such a being, and this is a circumstance essentially different from that in which we find every other intelligent being, it *may* be capable of self-existence, of which the others are not. Any real difference in the condition of these beings may be sufficient to interrupt the analogy between them, so that we cannot be authorised to conclude concerning the one, what we do concerning the other. But these beings differ in that very circumstance on which the inference, that a *superior cause is wanting*, depends. There must be some external cause of whatever is *limited* or *finite*. We cannot conceive the possibility of its independent existence. But whatever other difficulty attends the speculation, we cannot say the same concerning a being *unlimited* and *infinite*.

If any being whatever bear marks of *design*, there must exist somewhere a *mind* capable of that design ; and if it be not capable of it itself, we must look for it in some other being. But if that being has  
within

within itself that perfect comprehension of itself, as well as of all things else that depend upon it, we have no longer the same motive to make any farther enquiries. Such a being as this may, for any thing we can prove to the contrary, have existed without cause, and from eternity. At the same time it must be acknowledged, as before, that, supposing no visible universe to have existed, it is absolutely inconceivable by us, on what principles, as we may say, such a being as the author of this visible universe should exist. But being sensible of the one, we are necessarily led to infer the other.

I am, &c.

LETTER

## LETTER III.

*Concerning the seat of that intelligence, which  
is conspicuous in the visible universe.*

S I R,

I N former times, those who denied the being of a God, denied also that there was any proof of *intelligence*, or *design*, in the visible universe. This, however, you readily admit; but you insist upon it, that the *seat* of this intelligence and design, is in the visible universe itself, and not in any being foreign to it. On this subject you are sufficiently explicit. “The *vis naturæ*,” you say (*Prefatory Address*, p. 28) “the perpetual industry, intelligence, and provision of nature, must be apparent to all who see, feel, or think. I mean to distinguish this active, intelligent, and designing principle, inherent as much in matter as the properties of gravity, or any elastic attractive or repulsive power, from any extraneous foreign force and design in an invisible agent,

“ agent, supreme though hidden lord, and  
 “ master over all effects and appearances that  
 “ present themselves to us in the course of  
 “ nature. The last supposition makes the  
 “ universe and all other organized matter,  
 “ a machine, made or contrived by the ar-  
 “ bitrary will of another being, which other  
 “ being is called *God*; and my theory makes  
 “ a God of this universe, or admits no other  
 “ God or designing principle, than matter  
 “ itself, and its various organizations.”

I cannot help thinking, that when you  
 attend to this hypothesis, you must be satis-  
 fied that, on your own principles, it is ab-  
 solutely untenable. If it be the *marks of*  
*design* in the visible universe, that compel  
 you to admit there is a *principle of intelligence*  
 belonging to it, this principle must be the  
*cause* of those marks of design. But can you  
 think this to be even *possible*, when you  
 maintain, that every *cause* must necessarily  
 be prior to its *effect*. Here an orderly system  
 pre-supposes intelligence, and yet this intel-  
 ligence arises from the order. If this be not  
 what

what is called *arguing in a circle*, I do not know what is.

You may say, that the *universe*, and the *order* belonging to it (from which its principle of intelligence arises) were equally from eternity, and therefore, that the one is not prior to the other. But still, independent of any *priority*, you make the same thing to be, at the same time, *cause* and *effect* with respect to itself. The cause of *intelligence* is still that very *order*, or that *system* which is produced by it.

To say that the whole visible system always existed as it now does, the *cause of its own order*, i. e. of itself, is a very different thing from saying that an invisible author of nature had an eternal and necessary existence. This is merely a thing, of which we have no *idea*, or *comprehension*, but what implies no more *contradiction*, than that *space* or *duration* should have been from eternity, and uncaused; though in this case we cannot

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exclude

exclude the idea of them, or suppose them not to exist, and in the other we can.

Besides this capital defect in your hypothesis, and which obliges us to have recourse to that of an intelligent uncaused being, as the author of the visible universe, I have no objection to examining the two hypotheses by your own favourite test.

You say, as I have quoted before, "that  
 " it is impossible for an intellectual being  
 " firmly to believe in that of which he can  
 " give no account, or of which he can form  
 " no conception." You believe, however, that this visible universe, and the present course of nature, had no beginning; and as an atheist (believing nothing foreign to the system of nature) you *must* believe it. But look a little into your own mind, and say, whether you have any clearer idea of *nature*, than you have of the *author of nature* having had no beginning. If you be ingenuous, you must acknowledge, that you have no more  
 conception

conception of your own hypothesis, than you have of mine; and therefore, that, in the very first instance, you gain nothing at all by it; being as much embarrassed as ever with the necessary belief of something, which, in some respects, is absolutely incomprehensible to you.

Again, though you believe that there is a principle of intelligence and design in the visible universe, can you say that you have any proper idea *how* this exquisite design, that we see in the formation of plants and animals, &c. can possibly result from the conjoined action of such things as the sun, moon, and stars, earth, air, and water, &c. of which the visible universe consists, any more than of its belonging to a being that is not the object of our senses? In what respect, then, do you believe in things less incomprehensible than I do? We must both equally acknowledge, that we are led by the most undeniable facts to believe what we clearly comprehend to be necessary to the existence of those facts, though we are both of us

unavoidably led to speculate farther on the subject, till we get into regions far beyond our clear conception.

Exclusive of all *matter*, and of *deity* also, can you even say, that you have a distinct idea of *duration* itself having had no beginning; or of a whole eternity being actually expired at the present moment? This, you say (p. 30) is *an odd notion* of my own. But certainly that must be a proper *eternity*, or an *infinite duration*, which exceeds all *finite bounds*. Is it not thus that mathematicians always define *infinity*? Now, can you name, or write down, any number of *years*, or *periods of time*, that is not even infinitely exceeded by that *great period*, which is actually terminated by the present moment.

That the intelligence and design, which is apparent in the visible universe, should result from the several parts of this visible universe in conjunction, is so contrary to any analogy in nature, that whatever else  
we

we have recourse to, in order to account for it, this must be wholly inadmissible. And if a regular confutation of such a notion be at all difficult, the difficulty is of that kind which always attends the proving or disproving of such things as are almost self-evidently true or false.

The brain of a man, or of any other animal, is a homogeneous connected mass, and may as well be endued with the properties of *sensation and thought*, as a stone with that of *gravity*, or a load-stone with that of *magnetism*; there being only an equal difficulty in conceiving *how* such powers can belong to, or depend upon, their respective substances. But in the visible universe there is no such homogeneity, or connection of parts.

The *universe* at large, consisting of the different stars and their respective systems of planets, have less apparent connection than the *solar system*; and the parts of this have a less intimate connection than those

of any one of the planets, for instance, the *earth*, to which we belong, and which we have the best opportunity of examining. And yet, that the *earth*, consisting of land, water, and air, fossils, plants, and animals, should compose *one thinking substance*, is more incredible, than that a collection of buildings, called a *town*, should have a principle of intelligence, with *ideas* and *thoughts*, such as, by your own confession, must have been in that which comprehended and produced this system. For whatever is capable of *design*, is universally termed *mind*, and must have *ideas* and *thoughts*, whether it be material or immaterial. There is an end of all our reasoning concerning effects and causes, concerning marks of design and a principle of intelligence, if this conclusion may not be depended upon,

That principle of thought and intelligence, therefore, the marks of which cannot be denied to abound in the visible universe, must belong to something else than that universe. For, difficult as it may be  
to

to conceive, that there should be an *invisible being* pervading the whole system, and attentive to all things in it, and that this being should have existed without any foreign cause, the supposition, though ever so confounding to the imagination, is less difficult than the contrary; and one or other of them *must* be admitted.

You allow (p. 42) that there is in nature a principle of *production*, as well as of *destruction*; so that, “ whenever the globe  
 “ shall come to that temperament, which  
 “ is fit for the life of any lost species of  
 “ animals, whatever energy in nature produced it originally, if ever it had a beginning, will most probably be sufficient  
 “ to produce it again. Is not,” you say,  
 “ the reparation of vegetable life in the  
 “ spring, equally wonderful now as its  
 “ first production? yet this is a plain effect  
 “ of the influence of the sun, whose absence would occasion death, by a perpetual winter? So far is this question  
 “ from containing, in my opinion, a for-

“midable difficulty to the Epicurean system, that I cannot help judging the continual mutability of things, as an irrefragable proof of this eternal energy of nature.”

To me the conclusion which you think so very probable, appears to be drawn directly contrary to all the known rules of philosophizing. Supposing, as you do, the cause of destruction to any species of animals, to be a change of temperature in the climate, still the re-production of those animals, when the country should have recovered its former temperature, would be as proper a *miracle* as any thing to which a believer in revelation gives that name (and would, therefore, prove the existence of a power distinct from any thing in the visible universe, and superior to it) because we see nothing similar to this in any similar circumstances of things at present. Take a vessel of water, with fishes and insects in it. You may freeze that water, and consequently destroy all the animals that it contains. But though you may  
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thaw that water again, you might wait long enough before you would find any more such fishes or insects in it, provided you excluded the spawn, or eggs, of others.

If there be any such thing as the reproduction of any lost animal, as of that large one, the bones of which you speak of (p. 41) and there be no such thing as a being distinct from the visible universe, it must be produced by what now exists, and is visible to us; but how this should be done by any *law* or *power of nature*, with which we are acquainted (and beyond this we are not authorized to form any judgment at all) though, within your creed, is beyond my conception. As the animal you speak of was an inhabitant of the *earth*, I should imagine that you would think some power residing in, and belonging to, the earth itself might be sufficient for this purpose, without calling in the aid of the sun, moon, or stars. But how the earth, with all the animals and men upon it, are to go to work, in order to re-produce this animal, I have

no

no knowledge. I know that I should be able to contribute very little towards it. *The energy of nature, before which, you say, (p. 41) all difficulty vanishes,* is a fine expression; but when we come to realize our ideas, and to conceive in what manner this energy of nature is to be exerted, we are just as much at a loss how to connect it with the things to be produced by it, as if no such energy existed.

You say that "the reparation of vegetable life in the spring, is equally as wonderful now as at its first production," and that this "is the plain effect of the influence of the sun." I am really surprised that you can, even for a moment, suppose these two cases to be at all similar. We can only judge of *powers* by *observation* and *experience*. Now, whenever did you see any plant produced when the seed was properly destroyed? In this case, what can the *sun* do to produce it. If the sun has this power, why is it not sometimes exerted, so that we should see plants spring up  
by

by means of *heat* only, without their proper seeds? That there is a being distinct from the visible universe, possessed of the power of controuling its laws, is not a random supposition, like this of yours, but is sufficiently proved by *fact*, as the history of revelation shews.

I am, SIR,

Yours, &c,

#### LETTER IV.

*Of the proof of the being and attributes of  
GOD, from revelation.*

SIR,

I SHALL now venture to urge another argument, hinted at in the conclusion of the last letter, for the belief of a deity, as a being distinct from the visible universe, which you will not deny to be adapted to affect the minds of the *vulgar*; and if it be attended

tended to, it cannot, I think, fail to give satisfaction even to philosophical persons, and must contribute to remove any doubts that may have been occasioned by metaphysical speculations on the subject. The evidence I mean, is that of *miracles*, which, if they be undeniable, clearly prove the existence of a being distinct from what is visible in nature, and a being who can controul the laws of it; and this can be no other than the *author of nature*.

The evidences of revealed religion are generally considered as *subsequent* to those of natural religion, and both of them are generally treated of as altogether independent of each other. But as revelation supposes the being of a God, whose will is revealed to us, so the historical proof of actual interruptions in the usual course of nature, in the visible universe, is a distinct proof of the existence of a power foreign to the visible universe itself, and capable of controuling it. And if there be marks of *design* in such interpositions, if they be intended to answer  
some

some purpose, and some benevolent purpose, they are distinct proofs of the *intelligence* and *benevolence* of that foreign power. And that there have been such interruptions in the course of nature, we have, in my opinion, abundantly sufficient evidence. It is clear to me, that, all things considered, the man who disbelieves this evidence, must believe things much more extraordinary, and even more contrary to present appearances (as I think I have shewn in my *Institutes of natural and revealed religion*) than those which he rejects.

Such interpositions, in which the author of nature is exhibited as communicating his will to men, by the use of *language*, &c. is better adapted to give us an idea of a *character*, of a *disposition of mind*, and even of *design*, than the settled and regular course of nature; though to a reflecting mind, this does not fail to suggest the same thing. Let any man, the most sceptical in the world, be supposed to have been present when Moses heard the voice distinctly pronouncing the words, *I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,*

*Jacob*, &c. promising to bring his people out of Egypt, &c. and then to have passed through the red sea along with them, and also to have heard an audible voice pronouncing every word of the ten commandments from mount Sinai : or let a person be supposed to have heard the words which, in the course of the evangelical history, were three times audibly pronounced, but proceeding from no visible being, *This is my beloved Son, hear ye him* : let him have heard Jesus invoke that invisible being, and immediately afterwards raise Lazarus from the dead; and especially let him have conversed with Jesus after he had been publicly crucified and buried : I say, let us suppose any person whatever to have been present at any of these extraordinary scenes, so as not to be able to deny that astonishing changes in the laws of nature had really taken place; and then let us suppose it possible for him to deny the existence of a being distinct from what we call *nature*, or the *visible universe*, and capable of controuling its laws, if we can.

Moreover,

Moreover, if this great invifible being, who at his pleafure controuled the laws of nature, and thereby proved himfelf to be equal to the eftablifhment of them, announced himfelf to be the *author of nature*, and always affumed that character; can we fuppofe it poffible, that any perfon, who really believed fuch miraculous interpoftions, fhould entertain a doubt that there was an invifible author of nature, diftinct from any thing that he could fee in it? It is evident, therefore, that the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testaments are naturally adapted to give the fulleft fatisfaftion concerning the being of a God, as well as of the truth of revelation; and, therefore, that in order to difprove the being of a God, a perfon muft likewise difprove the evidences of the Jewish and of the christian revelations, which I think he will find it difficult to do, confiftently with his retaining faith in any hiftory whatever. But this is not my prefent bufinefs, farther than to point out the connection between the evidences of natural and revealed religion, and to fhew what you

have

have to do before you can effectually refute either of them.

I shall conclude this letter with shewing, that, admitting what you profess to do concerning the visible universe, the *intelligence*, and the *energy of nature*, you may admit the whole system of revelation; so that, in fact, you have conceded rather more than you intended.

If you admit an *intention*, or *design*, in nature, you cannot exclude the idea of what we call *character*, and proper *personality*, whether it belong to a being distinct from the visible universe, or to the visible universe itself; and admitting this, the whole system of revelation may follow. And this, in fact, is all that I am solicitous about, because it is all that I am affected by, as it implies every thing on which my hopes or fears are founded.

The power, or principle, that formed the eye, with a view to enable us to see distant objects,

objects, and which for excellent purposes established all the laws of nature, may also, for the best of purposes, have occasionally controuled them. That power which formed the organs of speech, may itself have spoken from mount Sinai, and have given mankind an assurance of a resurrection from the dead by Jesus Christ.

It is this *power* or *principle*, in whatever it resides, that commands my homage and obedience. It is *properties* and *powers*, and not *substance*, that I pretend to have any concern with. But I think it contrary to analogy, and the rules of just reasoning, to suppose these powers to reside in the visible universe; and therefore I prefer the hypothesis, which ascribes them to an invisible being, distinct from it.

If you admit a principle of intelligence, and a power of *production* and *reproduction* in nature, you are prepared to admit all the facts on which the system of revelation is founded; and whether they be true or false, is a

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thing to be determined by *historical evidence*.

If, as you say, "a future life be certainly desirable;" if you "firmly wish for it, and are determined to live as if there was one:"

If immorality, as you also say (*Prefatory Address*, p. 10) has not preceded your unbelief, and will not follow it, I have no doubt but that, by giving due attention to this evidence, you will again become a believer, and a christian. But then, I think, you will not long retain your present hypothesis, of a principle of intelligence and design residing in, and properly belonging to, the visible universe; as there will then be no conceivable reason why you should not believe, and rejoice in the belief of a supreme being, or a maker and a moral governor of the universe, as well as myself.

I am, SIR,

Your's, &c.

LETTER

## LETTER V.

*Of the moral attributes of the deity.*

S I R,

AS to the *moral attributes* of the deity, viz. his *benevolence* and his *justice*, I shall not enter very far into the argument at present, not thinking that what I advanced before is at all invalidated by your merely asserting the contrary.

You say (p. 22) "Take a view of human existence, and who can even allow that there is more happiness than misery in the world." I should think that you yourself allow it, when you speak (p. 27) of a future life (expecting it, I suppose, to resemble this) as *desirable*. However, the bulk of mankind, I doubt not, enjoy, and value their present existence. I do for one. You allow (p. 4) that the condition of man is in a state of *melioration*, and if this be the case, though happiness should not prepon-

derate over misery at present, it is sure to do so in due time; so that, looking forward to the whole of things, the argument for the goodness of God, with respect to mankind at least, is quite satisfactory. "Who," you say (p. 22) "will ever resolve the question "if evil and pain be good and necessary "now, why they will not always be so?" I answer, this may be the case in some degree, and yet be consistent enough with the proper meaning of the figurative descriptions of a future life in the scriptures. If you admit the doctrine of *melioration*, you must admit that, if we continue to exist, all evil will gradually vanish; and I think that, on the principles of Dr. Hartley's Theory of the Mind, I could shew, in some measure, *why* it will be so; but the discussion would be too long for this place.)

Your argument against the belief of a God, at least of a just and righteous being, on account of his not interposing to punish vice, and especially those who deny his existence, seems to me very unworthy of  
any

any person pretending to reason. " If that  
 " wished-for interposition of the deity is  
 " put off to a future existence, you say,  
 " (*Prefatory Address*, p. 30) I cannot help  
 " observing, that future day has been already  
 " a long while waited for in vain, and any  
 " delay destroys some one attribute or other  
 " of the deity. He wants justice, or he  
 " wants the power, or the will, to do good  
 " and be just. Shall such a tremendous  
 " being," you say (p. 49) " with such a care  
 " for the creatures he has made, suffer his  
 " own existence to be a perpetual doubt?  
 " If the course of nature does not give suf-  
 " ficient proof, why does not the hand di-  
 " vine shew itself, by an extraordinary in-  
 " terposition of power? It is allowed mi-  
 " racles ought not to be cheap, or plenty.  
 " One or two, at least, every thousand years  
 " might be admitted. But this is a per-  
 " petual standing miracle, that such a being  
 " as the depicted God, the author of nature,  
 " and all its works, should exist, and yet  
 " his existence be perpetually in doubt, or  
 " require a Jesus, a Mahomet, or a Priestley,

“ to reveal it. Is not the writing of this  
 “ very answer to the last of those three  
 “ great luminaries of religion, a proof that  
 “ no God, or no such God, at least, exists ?  
 “ Hear the admirable words of the author  
 “ of the *Système de la Nature*, How CAN HE  
 “ SUFFER A MORTAL LIKE ME TO QUES-  
 “ TION HIS RIGHTS, HIS TITLES, AND  
 “ EVEN HIS EXISTENCE ?”

This, Sir, I think to be as weak as (if  
 I may be allowed one harsh expression) it is  
 arrogant. You, and the author of the work  
 you quote, must have a very high opinion,  
 indeed, of your own importance, and, of  
 the force of your writings, to imagine that  
 a *miracle* is requisite to confute them. I  
 trust that something far short of this will  
 be abundantly sufficient for the purpose,  
 with respect to mankind at large ; and, as  
 to your own particular conviction, it may  
 be no very great object with the author of  
 the universe. His wise general laws, and  
 the excellent maxims of his government,  
 may admit a much greater partial evil than  
 that,

that, and make it subservient to good. The wisdom of God will, I doubt not, appear most conspicuous when it shall be seen, that sufficient provision was made two thousand years ago, for remedying all the evils, which, from foreign causes, have been introduced into the system of religion since that time. Christianity, I am confident, will be able, without the aid of any more miracles, to free itself from all its impurities, and command the assent of all the world; even the learned and most sceptical not excluded.

As to your calling upon the divine being to vindicate himself from your impiety, any wise and merciful sovereign, who should allow his subjects a proper time for forming their characters and conduct, before he thought proper to interpose, in order to reward or punish them, might be insulted in the same manner by weak and impatient minds. If there be any such thing as a *state of trial and discipline*, some *delay* in administering justice must be admitted; and

of what continuance that ought to be, there may be better judges than you, or the author of *the Systeme de la Nature*.

If you meant to pay me any compliment by classing me with *Jesus* and *Mahomet*, I must observe, that, to say nothing farther, it is a very aukward one. They (the one justly, and the other unjustly) pretended to divine communications, which you must know I never did.

I am, SIR, yours, &c,

## LETTER VI.

*Of the moral influence of religion.*

SIR,

YOU greatly misconceive, or mis-state the influence of religion, when you say (p. 43) "all that the belief of a God  
"and of a providence can in reality produce, scarce goes beyond some exterior  
"exercises,

“ exercises, which are vainly thought to  
 “ reconcile man to God, It may make  
 “ men build temples, sacrifice victims,  
 “ offer up prayers, or perform something  
 “ of the like nature; but never break a  
 “ a criminal intrigue, restore ill-gotten  
 “ wealth, or mortify the lust of man—  
 “ If no other remedy were applied to vice  
 “ than the remonstrances of divines, a great  
 “ city, such as London, would in a fort-  
 “ night’s time fall into the most horrid  
 “ disorder. — Religion may make men  
 “ follow ceremonies: little is the incon-  
 “ venience found in them. A great tri-  
 “ umph truly for religion to make men bap-  
 “ tize, or fast. When did it make men do  
 “ virtuous actions for virtue’s sake, or prac-  
 “ tice fewer inventions to get rich, where  
 “ riches would not be acquired without  
 “ poverty to others? The true principle  
 “ most commonly seen in human actions,  
 “ and which philosophy will cure sooner  
 “ than religion, is the natural inclination  
 “ of man for pleasure, or a taste contracted  
 “ for certain objects by prejudice and habit.

“ These

“These prevail in whatsoever faith a man  
“is educated, or with whatever knowledge  
“he may store his mind.”

Confident as you seem to be of your advantage on this head, I have no doubt but that, if I may oppose one assertion to another, religion has gained the end that you propose, viz. to *do virtuous actions for virtue's sake*, far more generally, and much more effectually, than philosophy has ever done; and that it hath carried men much higher in the path of virtue than you have even an idea of, if by the man who does virtuous actions *for virtue's sake*, you mean that *great and good man*, described in your Prefatory Address (p. 33) who *loves virtue because he finds a pleasure in it*. For this is far from being any heroic or noble principle. It is only a more refined selfishness. Whereas religion teaches men to love others as themselves, and implicitly to obey God and their consciences, as such, without any sinister view whatever. However, notwithstanding this, it is with the  
greatest

greatest wisdom that the hope of reward, and the fear of punishment, are proposed to us. If you have made any observations on the human mind, you must know that, with or without the belief of a God, men always begin to act from the simplest and lowest motives; and that it is only by degrees, and the force of habit, that these motives lose their influence, and that men become capable of acting from more generous and disinterested principles. If you be ignorant of this, you have much to learn, but you will find it admirably explained by Dr. Hartley, to whom I refer you on the subject.

It is by slow degrees that a child comes to love even his nurse, or his parents. At first, he loves his food and his play much more; but in time he becomes capable of sacrificing both, and even his life, and not only to serve them, but also his country and mankind. Though, therefore, religion begins with the *fear of God*, and the *hope of heaven*, at length *perfect love casteth out fear*,  
and

and the true christian *loves the Lord his God with all his heart* (being wholly devoted to his will) *and his neighbour as himself.*

Religion, if I have any idea of its nature and practical tendency, is a very different thing from what you suppose it to be. By extending our views to the certain prospect of a future and better life, it must, in proportion as its principles are attended to, give a man a higher idea of his *personal importance*, and of the *consequence of his actions*; and, in fact, will make him a superior kind of being to the man who believes that his existence will close in a few years, and may terminate to-morrow. You say (p. 46) that “an atheist, feeling himself to be a link in the grand chain of nature, feels his relative importance, and dreads no imaginary being;” but a theist, and a believer in revelation, conceives himself to be a much more important link in the same grand chain of nature, and therefore will feel himself more concerned to act

act a part worthy of his rank and station. If he *fears*, it is only that great being, who is the proper object of fear, and then only when his righteous will is not obeyed; and his *hope*, which is certainly a delightful and valuable principle, must be allowed to be infinitely superior to any thing that an atheist can pretend to.

Besides, upon your own principles, you cannot deny that religion *must* have great practical influence, if it be really believed, so long as mankind are governed by hopes and fears. Why is it that the *laws* and the *gallows*, as you say, keep in order such a city as London, but that men fear detection, and dread pain and death. But a real believer in revelation well knows that he can never escape detection, and that he has much more to fear than man can inflict upon him. How is it possible, then, that men should not be influenced by it? I make no doubt but that its practical influence is very great, and even that it weighs something with those who profess to disclaim it. Indeed, human  
nature

nature must be a thing very different from what we know it to be, if the principles of religion, firmly believed (as, no doubt, they are by many) have no real influence. No man, acquainted with history, or with common life, can deny the influence either of *enthusiasm*, or of *superstition*, which are only perversions of religion.

You do not hesitate to say (*Prefatory Address*, p. 21) that "whatever advantage religion hath had in the enumeration of its martyrs, the cause of atheism may boast the same," and you mention Vanini as a martyr for atheism. I will not dispute the point with you, but I think I have read an account of Vanini, which represents him as not having been properly an atheist, as not having had the power of recantation at the stake, and as suffering with more reluctance than has been sometimes given out; all which circumstances make his case much less to your purpose. But admitting all that you can wish with respect to it, very little, we know, is to be inferred from the conduct  
of

of any *single person*, because he may be influenced by motives which will have little weight with the generality of mankind.

On the contrary, it must be something adapted to influence *human nature in general*, and cannot but have real moment in the conduct of men, that can produce such lists of ready and chearful martyrs as christianity can boast; men of all countries, of all ages, and of every rank and condition in life, and differing from one another in as many circumstances (and especially in the belief of particular doctrines) as you can name; while they have agreed in nothing besides the *simple profession of christianity*, and the belief of *a future life of retribution*. There can be no doubt, therefore, but that, since the same causes will always produce the same effects, a time of persecution would now call forth as many martyrs as ever. Surely then, if we may judge from observation, as philosophers ought to do, we must be convinced, that there is something in *this belief* that is adapted to affect the hearts and lives of men,

84 ADDITIONAL LETTERS TO A

men, and that in the greatest and happiest manner.

Should you yourself suffer martyrdom in the cause of atheism, as you express your readiness to do, p. 21. (but in which few will believe you to be in earnest, because, with your prospects, they will think you a fool for so doing) it will contribute very little to impress mankind in general in favour of your principles; and though you may possibly have some admirers, I will venture to say, you will have few followers. Unbelievers, of my acquaintance, make no scruple of conforming to any thing that the state requires; and, I am confident, would be the first to laugh at you, if they were to see you going to the stake.

I am, SIR,

Your's, &c.

LETTER

## LETTER VII.

*Miscellaneous Observations.*

SIR,

**I** DO not care to animadvert upon all those passages in your answer, in which you seem to have mistaken my meaning; but I must take notice of one or two of them.

It is not fair in you to say, as you seem to do (p. 25) that because I have endeavoured to prove that an atheist cannot be quite sure that there will be no future state, I therefore allow that "the course of nature might be" "as it is without a God, and therefore that" "there is no natural proof of a deity." What then, Sir, was my object in those Letters, to which you have made a reply? Was it not to unfold and exhibit the natural proof of a deity? Do you infer what-

F

ever

ever you please from my writings, but do not insinuate that I myself infer, or allow it.

You charge me very unjustly (*Prefatory Address*, p. 29) with giving up a *particular providence*, and you say you give it up too; whereas I only deny those *frequent miraculous interpositions*, which some have supposed. But, notwithstanding this, I believe that every thing, and every event, in the whole compass of nature, was originally appointed to fit its proper place; and this you yourself must also admit, if you acknowledge a principle of *intelligence* and *design* in the universe. For this cannot be limited to some things only, but must extend to all. Besides, the greatest things have the strictest connection with, and dependence upon, the smallest.

If, which you allow, there was a real *design* in the original production of things, and in the establishment of the laws of nature, there must likewise have been a *fore-sight* of whatever would happen in consequence

quence of those laws, and therefore a proper adjustment of all events to one another; so that you cannot admit a proper intelligence in nature, without admitting the doctrine of a particular providence. Indeed, Sir, you should not have abandoned the old atheistical principle of *chance*, and admitted of *design* in nature, without attending to all the consequences of this principle. Only pursue that principle consistently, and you will soon come to believe all that I do.

You consider it as a false assertion, (p. 5) that "a cause need not be prior to its effect." Now many *secondary causes* cannot be conceived to exist a moment without producing their proper effects, as the sun without giving light, a magnet without attracting iron, &c. This, therefore, *may* be the case with the *original cause* of all things; so that his works, as well as himself, may have been from all eternity. This, however, I have only mentioned, as what may perhaps be a more probable supposition, than that the divine being should have existed a whole eternity,

without creating any other being. But this opinion is not necessarily connected with the simple proof of the being of a God.

It may not be amiss to take some notice of what you say with respect to *authority*, in the question we are discussing. I am as far as you can be from laying much stress on mere authority in matters of *speculation* and *reasoning*, though it is impossible for any man not to be more or less influenced by it. But I can by no means think with you (*Prefatory Address*, p. 24) that “modern philosophers are nearly all “atheists.” Indeed, if this be case, there must, by your account, be very few in this country, at least you are not acquainted with many of them; and therefore, from your personal knowledge, can have no authority for the assertion. For you say (*ib.* p. 16) you know of none besides *yourself* and *your friend*, the joint authors of this answer to my Letters. I am ready, however, to allow that what you say may be nearly true with respect to France and Italy, though

though I believe it is by no means the case, as yet, in England; and if you confine yourself to those who have really advanced the bounds of natural knowledge, and who have distinguished themselves the most in the character of *philosophers*, you will not, I think, find so many atheists among them, in any country, as you may have supposed.

You mention Hume, Helvetius, Diderot, and D'Alembert; but I do not remember to have heard of any discoveries in natural or moral science made by any of them. This I do not say to insult them, or to insinuate that they are not entitled to the reputation they have gained, though I scruple not to avow this with respect to Mr. Hume. They have their excellencies, but they are of a different kind. Some of them are mathematicians, but, properly speaking, I do not know that any of them are to be allowed a rank, at least any high rank, among philosophers. In a general way of speaking, indeed, it may be proper enough to call any person a philosopher,

*see the Erratum at the end.*

pher, who only gives his attention to the subject of philosophy, and is acquainted with the discoveries of others; but when you mentioned particular names, as those of persons known to the world in the character of philosophers, and especially so few as *four*, you should have selected those who had made important discoveries of their own. You can hardly think it sufficient to entitle a man to the rank of a *philosopher*, that he is merely *an unbeliever in natural or revealed religion*.

As to what you are pleased to say (ib. p. 24) I myself might have been, if I had not "from my first initiation into science, *been* " ~~being~~ dedicated to what is called the "immediate service of God," it is a thing that cannot be known, except to my maker. It is evident, that you have little knowledge of my history, nor is it of any importance to the world that it should be known. I have, however, been more than once, and for a considerable length of time, near fourteen years in all, out of what you, in ridicule,

cule, call the *immediate service of God*, after I had been several years engaged in it; and now, without having any reason to complain of age or infirmity, and in preference perhaps to more lucrative pursuits, I have, from pure choice, resumed it; and I hope to continue in it as long as I shall be capable of doing the duties of it.

Sincerely wishing that you may come to see the subject of our discussion in the same light with myself, and thereby attain to the same perfect satisfaction in your pursuits and prospects, that I have in mine,

I am,

SIR,

Your very humble servant,

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T H E E N D.

# ERRATUM, &c.

Page 70, l. 16, ~~for~~ *being* read *been*.

As what I have observed concerning Mr. Hume, &c. page 69, may be misunderstood, and be thought to be invidious, I shall add what I have taken several opportunities of saying before, viz. that I am far from thinking that it requires great mental powers to make discoveries in natural philosophy. They have generally been made by accident. But as Mr. Hammon seemed willing to avail himself of the authority of *philosophers*, I have only noted, that, be their merit what it may, that kind of authority, strictly speaking, and when the term is properly defined, makes very little for him, not many of those who have distinguished themselves in that way having been atheists.